



## A better kind of herd

At the end of this week, do you find yourself on Team Meghan or Team Windsor? Of course, you may not care, but I'm struck by the way the social media world encourages us to take sides.

In Lockdown, one of my deeply middle aged discoveries has been "The Gilmore Girls" on Netflix. It's a series from fifteen years ago about a single mother, Lorelei, and her teenage daughter, in which they banter about life, and pretty much nothing happens. If you want an alternative to Scandi Noir where there's always a murderer around the corner, this is it. Anyway, I just stumbled on an fan article about it, and apparently the key question for Gilmore Girls fans is whether you're on Team Chris or Team Luke. (For the uninitiated, Chris is Lorelei's old flame who she may or may not get back together with; Luke is the guy who owns the coffeeshop who Lorelei also likes and may or may not get together with.)

At first, I bought into the whole premise and I started to wonder if I was Team Luke or Team Chris. But then I realised that I didn't really mind; they are both thoroughly decent men with different charms, and I'll be happy for Lorelei if finally ends up with either of them or indeed if she just stays single.

So too with Team Meghan and Team Windsor, I wonder why it's not possible to have sympathies with both sides, recognising that there are flaws on both sides.

In a recent piece, Rowan Williams has discerned, though, that while tribalism like this is a problem, there isn't something inherently wrong with tribes themselves. We are so used to criticising 'herd mentality' that we've forgotten to think about what actual herds are like and how they can actually carry a kind of corporate wisdom.

His parallel is with tribes of geese, arguably a flock rather than a herd but the point stands. They wheel away across the sky in their distinctive V shapes. Within the flock, some deep intelligence leads to different birds to take to the front at different times, so that not all have to fly at the same pace all the time. It is not a mindless conformity, but it is a mutually dependent team at work.

So while you can view this kind of linkage as enforced conformity, a better perspective might be, as Williams says, that it is 'attentiveness, so careful and sensitive that people learn to flow around one another as they move, not surrendering to something subhuman but rising to a different level of human understanding and action.'

At the moment, we have something of the worst of both worlds. People either gravitate to thoughtless mobs, or doggedly insist on their independence, and refuse to acknowledge the values of being part of a community. That's not how it actually should be, and in a church, we should try to embody the better form of community.

*Mar 12 21 Thought. for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*